EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

The development of Oberlin Public Library's (OPL) The Bridge represents the best of small community life. In the late 1990s, a diverse group of residents recognized the digital divide (lack of computer and Internet access) was holding some residents back. They quickly took action. In 2000, they created a center, located in the heart of downtown, where everyone could learn to use computers and software and access equipment and the Internet freely. The Bridge was an immediate success.

Since the early 2000s, the way Americans use technology has changed significantly. From desktop computers and dialup Internet to handheld smartphones and 5G broadband, technology is much more than a tool to use. It's inextricably woven into the fabric of everyday life.

The kind of access The Bridge provides – desktop and laptop computers and wired and Wi-Fi Internet access – does not align as closely with community need as it did in 2000. Many residents have their own devices and Internet access at home, school or work. At the same time, there are residents who continue to rely on The Bridge and would not have technology access otherwise.

Public libraries are key access points for technology in communities across the United States. In addition to basic computers and the Internet, libraries provide specialized and emerging technology like graphic design software, audio and video recording equipment and virtual reality equipment. Residents who learn to use these types of technology gain skills that can be used for school, work and life enrichment.

Need for Technology Resources

Through a robust process, LibraryIQ analyzed current use of The Bridge and community desire for library technology access through analysis of operating data, a public survey, personal stakeholder interviews and focus groups. Thank you to the project committee and more than 640 Oberlin residents who participated in the project.

The Oberlin community wants to ensure that OPL continues to provide all residents access to basic technology and the Internet as well as more advanced technology. The one-on-one support The Bridge currently offers is valued, especially by seniors, and there is a desire for that service to continue.
“The Bridge has not offered enough services to meet current needs of the community. Bridge needs to be pushed out of its comfort zone.”

Recurring Themes

Specific feedback and requests recurred through the research process.

REQUESTS:
- More than basic equipment
- Equipment and software for audio and video production, podcasting and graphic design
- Memory lab equipment for digitizing photos, slides and home movies
- Tablets, laptops and Wi-Fi hotspots loaned for use at home
- eGaming space and equipment for high school students
- Adaptive equipment for residents with disabilities
- Space and equipment for eGaming for teens
- Space and advanced equipment for a business center and coworking
- A smaller facility with more services offered outside the building out in the community (especially senior living)
- More hands on technology engagement for children including STEAM programs, robotics and coding
- More modern furniture and fixtures
- A quality coffee bar, especially from high school students
- Privacy and comfort
- Continue to offer one-on-one tech support

FEEDBACK:
- A central location is optimal. Move Bridge equipment and services to OPL building
- Rented space is costly and likely to increase; therefore a barrier to improvement
- More outreach or partnerships with schools and other organizations is needed
- There are not many places for the community to gather in Oberlin
- The Backspace facility is underused
- Marketing The Bridge won’t work unless there is a specific, valuable benefit for residents
- Downtown location is good
- Consider co-location at Prospect community center (this location is not walkable and public transportation is limited)
COMMUNITY ANALYSIS

Oberlin, Ohio, located in Lorain County 31 miles southwest of Cleveland, is a city with residents who care about the community and one another. With deep roots in education (City founders John Shipherd and Philo P. Stewart also founded what became Oberlin College), the community has a long history of inclusion and involvement.

Oberlin was conceived as an integrated community. Oberlin College was the first college in the country to admit men and women as well as African-Americans to degree programs. Oberlin was a focus of the abolitionist movement in the United States and was an active terminus on the underground railroad.

Oberlin is a quintessential college community, with historic landmarks and architecture, independently owned restaurants, shopping and galleries and a strong sense of community. Arts and culture are important, with Oberlin College and its world famous Conservatory of Music attracting many musicians and music lovers.

Households and Families

Oberlin is relatively small with a total population of about 8,555. In 2016-2020, there were 2,511 households with an average household size of 2.27. The median age was 22.9 years. An estimated 13.1 percent of the population was under 18 years, 51.0 percent was 18 to 44 years, 16.3 percent was 45 to 64 years, and 19.6 percent was 65 years and older.

Most residents (an estimated 93.5 percent) are U.S. natives and 45.9 percent were born in Ohio. A language other than English is spoken at home by 13.4 percent of residents. Spanish was spoken by 6.4 percent of people at least five years old; 4.4 percent reported that they did not speak English “very well.”

Education

Oberlin is an educated community with 93.7 percent of those 25 years and over having graduated from high school and 51.6 percent having a bachelor’s degree or higher. An estimated 6.2 percent did not complete high school.

Total school enrollment in Oberlin city, Ohio was 4,115 in 2016-2020. Nursery school enrollment was 70 and kindergarten through 12th grade enrollment was 822. College or graduate school enrollment (primarily Oberlin College) was 3,223.

Need for Adaptive Equipment

Public libraries serve the entire community, therefore resources for those with disabilities are important. 12.6 percent of Oberlin residents reported a disability, with 6.7 percent of people under 18, 9.8 percent of those 18 to 64 and 27.2 percent of those 65 and over reporting a disability.

Employment

48.7 percent of the population 16 and over were employed; 47.7 percent were not currently in the labor force in 2016-2020. An estimated 89 percent of the people employed were private wage and salary workers; 7.8 percent were federal, state or local government workers; and 3.2 percent were self-employed.

Income

The median income of households in Oberlin city, Ohio was $49,840. The Ohio state average was $58,116. An estimated 9.6 percent of households had income below $10,000 a year and 5.1 percent had income over $200,000 or more. Median earnings for full-time year-round workers was $44,247. Male full-time year-round workers had median earnings of $47,340. Female full-time year-round workers had median earnings of $42,519. An estimated 38.2 percent of households received Social Security and an estimated 31.1 percent of households received retirement income other than Social Security.

Poverty and Participation in Government Programs

In 2016-2020, 24.9 percent of people were in poverty. An estimated 33.7 percent of children under 18 were below the poverty level, compared with 7.6 percent of people 65 years old and over. An estimated 30.1 percent of people 18 to 64 years were below the poverty level. 8.8 percent of households received SNAP (the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program). An estimated 23.4 percent of households that received SNAP had children under 18, and 53.6 percent of households that received SNAP had one or more people 60 years and over.

Hispanic Origin and Race

For people reporting one race alone, 73.0 percent were White; 10.7 percent were Black or African American; 0.6 percent were American Indian and Alaska Native; 5.5 percent were Asian; 0.0 percent were Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander; and 0.6 percent were Some other race. An estimated 9.5 percent reported Two or more races. An estimated 8.3 percent of the people in Oberlin city, Ohio were Hispanic or Latino. (People of Hispanic origin may be of any race.)

Computer and Internet Use

In 2016-2020, 93.6 percent of households in Oberlin city, Ohio had a computer, and 82.1 percent had a broadband Internet subscription. An estimated 82.0 percent of households had a desktop or laptop, 75.8 percent had a smartphone, 55.2 percent had a tablet or other portable wireless computer, and 3.2 percent had some other type of computer.

Among all households, 65.9 percent had a cellular data plan; 73.8 percent had a broadband subscription such as cable, fiber optic, or DSL; 7.8 percent had a satellite internet subscription; 0.0 percent had dial-up alone; and 0.3 percent had some other service alone.

Culture

Oberlin has a hometown feel; many who attend Oberlin College remain in the community after graduation or return in later years. A compact downtown means easy walking and biking to restaurants, shops and galleries. In 2012, Oberlin was recognized as one of Ohio’s BEST Hometowns in Ohio Magazine’s sixth annual Ohio’s Best Hometowns issue. The same year Oberlin also won the first MetLife Foundation Generations United Best Intergenerational Communities Award for “fostering an environment where generations live and work together” and where all generations are an integral part of the community’s fabric.

THE BRIDGE ANALYSIS

The Bridge is OPL’s technology access division. The mission of The Bridge is to provide innovative technology access and education to the community.

The Bridge was launched after Oberlin Community Services convened a Community Technology Committee that identified a digital divide in Oberlin and the need for accessible computer and technology resources.

The Bridge: Oberlin’s Community Technology Center opened on July 10, 2000 with a computer camp for young children then subsequently opened to the public in August. OPL supported the effort from the beginning and The Bridge ultimately became a division of the Library in 2002. The Bridge expanded to offer classes at Mount Zion Baptist Church and distributed donated computers to the public.

The Bridge received the American Library Association’s Library of the Future Award in 2005 and was recognized as the Best Library Link by Reader’s Digest in 2006. Since its inception, The Bridge has served over 9,500 patrons and has donated 84 computers to Oberlin residents.

Hours of Operation

The Bridge reduced hours of operation during the COVID-19 pandemic and is slowly returning to pre-pandemic service levels.

Current hours of operation are:

  Monday - Thursday: 10:00 a.m. - 8:30 p.m.
  Friday + Saturday: 10:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.

Current OPL hours of operation are:

  Monday - Thursday: 10:00 a.m. - 8:30 p.m.
  Friday + Saturday: 10:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.
  Sunday: 1:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.

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### Nearby Library Technology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Library Name</th>
<th>Distance in Miles from The Bridge</th>
<th>Driving Time in Minutes from The Bridge</th>
<th>Available Technology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Grafton-Midview Library | 9.2 miles                        | 16 minutes                              | • 13 desktops: 4 adult stations, 3 for children, 6 for teens  
• Wi-Fi access  
• Laptops for program use only  
• Patrons can print from their phones only  
• Other tech: hotspots, Google VR (Cardboard), working on getting Roku stations, play launchpads that circulate, video games, systems and controllers that circulate, VR Beatz that circulate, coding technology and drones that circulate |
| Amherst Library      | 8.3 miles                        | 14 minutes                              | • Currently under construction, after reopening:  
• 16 computers  
• Wi-Fi access  
• No laptops that circulate  
• Patrons can print from their devices  
• Wi-Fi hotspots circulate for 3 weeks |
| EPLA Keystone LaGrange Library | 9.5 miles                        | 14 minutes                              | • 4 desktops  
• 4 laptops  
• Wi-Fi access  
• Laptops for in-library use only  
• Patrons can print from their devices  
• Other tech includes catalog for projectors, AV adjust system |
| Herrick Memorial Library | 8.5 miles                        | 14 minutes                              | • 4 public computers  
• Wi-Fi access  
• Laptops for in-library use only  
• Patrons cannot print from their devices  
• Photocopy and fax machines available |
Budget and Funding

In Ohio, public libraries are funded through the Public Library Fund (PLF). Each month, the PLF receives 1.7 percent of the state’s total tax revenue received during the previous month in the General Revenue Fund (GRF). State tax revenue that goes into the GRF comes from the state personal income tax, sales and use tax, business taxes, etc.

The Oberlin Public Library is funded by the Oberlin Public Library’s 3.25-mill operating levy that was renewed by voters in May 2021 for five years. Each year the levy generates $726,646 and accounts for more than half of the library’s roughly $1.2 million annual budget.

The Bridge expenses comprise about 16 percent of the total OPL budget each year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BRIDGE EXPENSES</th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salaries and Benefits</td>
<td>$148,822</td>
<td>$159,297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent and Utilities</td>
<td>$30,890</td>
<td>$32,721</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supplies and Equipment</td>
<td>$2,000</td>
<td>$2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>$181,712</td>
<td>$194,017</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

State and National Average Comparison

The chart below compares OPL/The Bridge computer use with state and national averages as well as use per capita. State and national average data is for 2019, the most recent year for which national data is available.

The chart below includes publicly reported data from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) in 2019 (most recent available).

- Total computer use decreased 40 percent from 2015 to 2019.
- Computer use per capita decreased 40 percent from 3.10 to 1.87 from 2015 to 2019, which is above the national average of 0.69 and above the Ohio average of 1.09.
- Computer use is declining as patrons increasingly use personal devices to access the Internet.

Based on an operational cost of $181,712 and 3,196 patron visits in 2019, the average cost per visit was $57. OPL’s cost per visit in 2019 was $7.29.

Operations were interrupted due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. The Bridge was closed from March 16 through May 12 and reopened with limited hours. The Backspace was open during January and February only in 2020. Based on an operational cost of $194,017 and 2,606 patron visits, the average cost per visit was $74.

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**Use Statistics**

In 2019, of every 100 people that visited OPL, six attended a program (four of whom were children), 12 used a computer and 82 checked out a book or other item. Of every 100 visitors to the average Ohio library, 11 attend a program, 19 use a computer and 70 check out a book or other item.

2020 STATISTICS:

- Backspace: 1,237 drop in hours, 858 participants
- Bridge: 4534 hours, at least one patron in the facility
- Bridge: 1,766 patrons (closed March 16-May 12; limited hours upon reopening)
- Tutoring: 26 hours, 54 participants
- My First Computer Camp: 248 participants
- 12 classes with 48 students attending

2021 STATISTICS:

- Bridge: 2,537 hours with at least one patron in the facility
- Bridge: 3,185 patrons

**Facility**

The current facility, located across the street from OPL, offers desks with desktop computers. The Backspace, accessible via a separate door, offers a small space for gaming, a 3D printer, desks with desktop computers and staff space.

OPL rents The Bridge space, which is due for an update. The facility, especially the Backspace, is large for current demand. There is one desk in the Backspace where patrons can take part in virtual meetings; there are no private spaces for calls or meetings (libraries in other communities offer private or semi-private spaces). Wheelchair access is on the side of the building and is not automated.

Carpeting was replaced in both areas during the last five years and the front computer lab area was painted in December 2021.

**Equipment and Software**

Current Bridge equipment includes:

- 3D printer
- Office 2016
- Photoshop
- Publisher
- Virus protection
- Charging station
- Three staff computers
- 10 public access computers (8 in the Backspace)
- Computers are 2 to 5 years old

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10 Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2019.
• Wireless printing is available for patrons’ personal devices
• In house system is used to dispense time, release print jobs, and safeguard public computers
• Oberlin Cable COOP provides free Internet service to The Bridge
• Bridge 8Mbps Upload, 200 Mbps download
• Bridge staff provides IT support
• 3D printer available

Not currently available at the Bridge:

• No laptops or Chromebooks available for checkout in-or outside the facility
• No portable wireless hotspot routers or Wi-Fi devices available for checkout
• No TTY or adaptive technology for disabled patrons available
• OPL and The Bridge do not take advantage of E-rate (not necessary with donated Internet)

A technology refresh is needed; adding 21st century technology and a space or spaces for technology access might draw new patrons and uncover service needs and gaps. Libraries today rely on technology to serve patrons as much as patrons rely on libraries to stay connected to the digital world.

Digital security is handled by Bridge and OPL staff and appropriate steps have been taken to protect patron data. It is unclear if disaster recovery is in place, and no clear understanding of how long it would take to get critical systems up and running in the event of an interruption of critical software platforms.

While public access computers are functional, hardware and software are several iterations removed from what patrons need on a day-to-day basis. The implementation of an “end of life” replacement schedule for computers and version updates of software will keep the technology looking fresh as well as provide patrons with the current tools that they need to be productive.

It is important to provide access to current versions of Microsoft Office products, the ability to edit pdfs, access to audio/video editing software and easy access to cloud storage platforms such as Dropbox. Some software platforms can be provided at no cost through the use of open source programs such as Gimp and Audacity. A pre-selected list of helpful links that patrons can easily access for legal, medical, genealogical and database usage is another step in creating a highly usable and interesting patron experience.

Patrons with disabilities are often overlooked when planning technology enhancements. There are many technologies available to accommodate disabled patrons and some are available at no cost. It is relatively easy to set up ADA capabilities for text-to-speech, extra-large type for vision impaired and input devices to accommodate patrons with motor function challenges. These adaptive technologies make a real difference for patrons with special needs and should always be considered when planning for new technology.

It is understood that the technology return on investment can be challenging as the cost can seem overwhelming compared to the new technology usage statistics. Statistics, however, do not fully convey the ripple effect specialized equipment or a makerspace may have on total usage for patrons of all age groups. Spaces with multiple technology purposes can be the draw that moves the needle to increase patron engagement.

OPL and The Bridge would benefit from collaborative relationships to provide better processes and pricing from vendors in both software and hardware. Technology vendor pricing for a single library is difficult to negotiate; working with support groups or partnerships can reduce annual costs.

Providing excellent access to existing and emerging technology is no easy task and requires work and dedication. Technology impact is measured by much more than use statistics – it is an invitation and beacon
to a generation that may not know all of the things that OPL and The Bridge offer and a glimpse into the future for those that did not grow up in a digital world.

**Programs and Services**

Services have been limited during the past two years because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Pre-pandemic services, which had not resumed as of the date of this report, included:

- **Basic computer classes:**
  - Basic Skills I (three sessions each week)
  - Basic Skills II (three sessions each week)

- **Specialized computer classes:**
  - Excel
  - Power Point
  - Digital Imaging
  - Publisher
  - eBooks, eReaders, iPads and other handheld devices
  - Facebook
  - Intro to Windows 10 and cleaning out unwanted programs

- **One-on-one support for devices and software**

The Bridge Director noted the Backspace afterschool program for children, robotics and video production summer camps, computer classes in partnership with the Oberlin Recreation Dept for youth and the “WISE” program in partnership with Oberlin Community Services are the most successful.

Programs in website development and a gadget table with tablets for patrons to try were less successful. Most innovative were a 3D printer workshop, robotics camp for youth and workshops on using Overdrive on tablets.

“People in Oberlin love and are proud of The Bridge -- yet they want to see updated services and a modern, comfortable facility.”
Outreach and Partnerships

Outreach – service beyond library walls – is a highly effective way to provide modern library services and grow visibility in the community.

Partnerships are the key to successful outreach. Developing successful partnerships expands the reach of staff and provides many benefits to the greater community. Partnering with the Lorain Community College and local high schools can provide students with hands-on technology experience while assisting patrons with laptops and mobile devices. In some cases, students may earn academic or community service credit. The Bridge currently partners with the following organizations:

- Oberlin College
- FAVA - Youth art related programs
- Goodwill of Lorain County - Digital Career Accelerator
- OAAGHG - Oberlin African American Genealogy & History Group
- Oberlin City Schools
- US Census Bureau - site for job applicants
- Oberlin Heritage Center - Google Sketch Up class
- Oberlin Community Services - WOSE career program for women
- Oberlin City Parks & Recreation - K-5 computer skills training
- Oberlin Cable COOP - bring Internet to low income homes

PUBLIC SURVEY

Of all public survey respondents, 60 percent have visited OPL in the past three years, 5 percent have visited just The Bridge, 30 percent have visited both and 6 percent have visited neither.

Approximately one third of those that visited The Bridge used a desktop computer during their visit. 9 percent used their own device and Bridge Wi-Fi and 5 percent used the 3D printer. Nearly 40 percent did not use any equipment.

Most survey respondents (90 percent) own or have access to a computer and 95 percent have access to the Internet. A large majority (75 percent) have access to software like Microsoft Office.

Access to basic computers is most important to 43 percent of survey respondents, the ability to do online research is important to 36 percent and the collection of electronic books is most important to 23 percent of survey respondents.

There is a desire for equipment and services not currently available at OPL or The Bridge. 49 percent of respondents would like tablets, laptops and Wi-Fi hotspots available to borrow. 37 percent would like access to equipment for podcasting and video production, 32 percent would like technology and amenities for co-working and 32 percent would like access to specialized equipment for accounting, computer-aided design, etc.

Many respondents would like more convenient access to technology. 55 percent would like access via the website, 45 percent at the current Bridge location and 34 percent in the OPL building. Among those who don’t use The Bridge, 58 percent have technology and Internet access at home, 34 percent don’t know what The Bridge offers and 15 percent are not interested in services offered at The Bridge.
Among respondents who have visited neither OPL nor The Bridge, desire for convenience is even stronger. 79 percent of this group would like access via the website, 29 percent at an expanded OPL and 25 percent at the current Bridge location. 46 percent of this nonuser group want access to specialized software like accounting, computer-aided design or customer management systems. Additionally, 36 percent want emerging equipment like laser cutters, soldering equipment, etc.

A majority (75 percent) of respondents say there is no new equipment or software they would use at The Bridge. Among those who did request new resources, the following were most mentioned:

- Desktop publishing software
- Adobe Creative Suite software
- Tablets
- Maker items (laser cutter, sewing machine)
- Music and film editing software
- CAD software
- Virtual reality equipment
- Podcasting equipment
- Video production equipment
- Equipment to convert photos, slides and home movies to digital

Most respondents (70 percent) are 50 or older, 14 percent are 40-49, 8 percent are 30-39, 5 percent are 23-29 and only a few were 18 or younger. Most are White, 14 percent are Black or African American, two percent are Hispanic or Latino and two percent are Asian or Pacific Islander.

Please see Appendix I for a complete public survey summary.

FOCUS GROUPS

Five focus groups were conducted over a two week period in February 2022. A diverse group of stakeholders attended with lively conversation about the Oberlin community, technology needs, The Bridge and how to best provide technology access. Recurring themes emerged in several categories.

General

- Create a public space that is an information hub.
- Bridge has a strong opportunity to contribute to downtown. Leverage it.
- What they do is fine - just make it smaller/nicer.
- Oberlin needs a better way for residents to learn about social services.
- Bridge should be a community information hub.
- Expand existing library to include technology.
- Gap in Oberlin is not the Internet or equipment; it’s training and opportunities.
- Bridge is socially and culturally a neutral space.
- Residents need tech training and support.
- Now is a good time to review The Bridge (post COVID).
- Some seniors feel “lost in the shuffle” with technology.
- It has already been hard enough with the pandemic. Don’t take the Bridge from me. Help, don’t hurt.
- Create a space for more people to experience customized technology learning.
Facility

- Downtown location is good but the building needs attention.
- Expand the existing library and bring tech services in.
- Use the green space next to the building.
- Need space for groups and also privacy.
- Need more privacy.
- Smaller physical footprint with much more outreach.
- Drop in space for after school would be helpful.
- Downtown location is important and good.
- Current Bridge building needs attention.
- Oberlin lacks community space. Bridge can become a community space.
- Consider co-location at the Prospect community center.

Programs and Services

- Make Bridge a place where people can learn about social services.
- Provide a high quality scanner and place to record music.
- Pair equipment with programs/training to support it.
- People want one-on-one help. Provide resources that help people find jobs.

Equipment and Software

- Some seniors (especially in public housing) don’t have home Internet.
- Find a way for them to have Internet/devices at home.
- Lend Wi-Fi hotspots and earphones.

Outreach and Partnerships

- Partner with Lorain Community College.
- Bridge needs to be pushed out of its comfort zone and out onto the community.

Marketing

- Grassroots promotion works best.

High School Students

- Ensure that elementary and middle school students’ needs are represented and addressed in any technology plan.
- OPL is all books, no technology.
- There is a “shortage of computers” in Oberlin.
- High School students do not use the Bridge.
- All students have access to a computer in school.
- Most students have cell phones.
- High school students would use technology / gather OPL if welcomed.
- “Best part of technology is you can do anything you want from where you are.”
- EGaming is extremely popular with students, many do not have access to computers after school to participate.
- “If there was a space to EGame, yes they would come.”
- Students gather at OPL to do school projects, but are not able to use computers there and do not go
to The Bridge.
- Slow Train Coffee Shop in Town is popular for people to meet and work, but that is for the college crowd.
- Students would like something similar to Slow Train to gather, access technology, work on school projects, EGame.
- Students have had positive experiences in School in 6-7th grade with STEM/STEAM. High School students would come to a space that offers access to STEAM learning, Virtual Reality, 3D Printers, specialized softwares. “People would take a more active interest if the Library offered these things.”
- Tweens are “over” The Bridge. They now use OPL because there are comfortable chairs.

**INTERVIEWS**

One-to-one interviews were conducted with leaders of OPL, The Bridge and the Oberlin community as well as staff and other stakeholders. Opinions and suggestions are grouped by category.

**General**

- OPL needs a clear vision or goal for technology access.
- All have access to tech through phones - underserved need laptops for work, job application, etc.
- Oberlin has a huge income disparity magnified by a small population.
- Much of Oberlin is walkable. Transportation is an issue for residents with disabilities and weather can make walking not feasible.
- “I don’t know anybody who uses The Bridge.”
- OPL would benefit from a better community room with tech.
- People don’t need access to tech the way they did when Bridge opened.
- Bridge is now empty most of the time. Still needed but on a smaller scale.
- Bridge has not offered enough services to meet current needs of the community.

**Facility**

- Provide tech access at Prospect Elementary community center.
- Current central Bridge location is walkable and bikeable. Mobile lab/library not necessary.
- Oberlin needs more community gathering space.
- The Backspace should be repurposed or closed.
- Technology access space is needed in Oberlin.
- Bridge needs to improve and should move to the OPL.
- Separate building for tech access is a disconnect from the library.
- More space for teens would be good.
- Offer privacy and comfort.
- Space could be used by other groups (currently not allowed).

**Programs and Services**

- Tech additions should be in addition to (not at the cost of) other services. Public loves the collection.
- Offer Wi-Fi hotspots for circulation.
- Consider a memory lab for converting photos/videos to digital. Circulate this equipment (patrons can take home).
- Consider a business center with advanced tech and library resources.
- One-on-one tech instruction is important.
• Consistency of services is an issue.
• Update equipment and space. Mirror what is in schools.

**Outreach and Partnerships**

• More outreach or partnerships with other organizations are needed.
• Much more and better partnerships with schools.

**Marketing**

• More outreach or partnerships with other organizations are needed.
• Marketing the Bridge won’t work unless there is a specific, valuable benefit for residents (something they don’t already have).

“The gap in Oberlin is not Internet or equipment; it’s training and opportunities.”
RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on best practices, return on investment evaluation and community feedback, the following recommendations are offered for consideration:

1. **Integrate a technology learning center within the existing OPL building.**
   
   A. Explore ways to expand the footprint of the Library, including leveraging the large meeting room and/or resetting shelving.
   
   - Library designers are available to provide a layout that accommodates all services.
   - Savings from facility consolidation and annual budget surplus can be applied to OPL building reset.
   - OPL expansion to provide more community gathering space could be considered over time.

   B. It is preferred that all services, including tech services, are under one roof in a more modern, comfortable, welcoming environment.
   
   - Computers, printers and other equipment would continue to be available on a scale that aligns with demand.

   C. Current Bridge staff would be based at the OPL facility.
   
   - The one-one-one support currently provided would continue.

2. **Update technologies, equipment and services to better reflect the entire population’s current needs (see equipment/software recommendations below). Bring the tech assistance out into the community.**
   
   A. OPL currently runs a budget surplus; this surplus can be used to invest in new equipment and software.

3. **Provide a modern business center with private spaces and up-to-date equipment for working, remote conferencing and small to midsize meetings.**

The services currently provided by The Bridge would not go away. They would continue to be offered on a scale that aligns with current demand. This change opens opportunities for new technology and services to be added.

**Budget and Funding**

- Consider expanding supplies and equipment budgets. Library visits track investment. If new and interesting equipment and video games and equipment are purchased, more community members may engage.
- Explore private funding options including library/STEM or STEAM grants, individual and corporate fundraising.

“A separate building for technology access is a disconnect from the library.”
Facility

- Create an open, airy, modern space for community gathering and tech access.
- Provide space, privacy and quality amenities for meetings and co-working.
- Invest in new furniture and a more modern environment.
- Partner with the City Council and local schools to offer space for high school students.

Equipment/Software

- Provide adaptive technology for patrons with disabilities, especially TTY services, text-to-speech, extra-large type and input devices to accommodate patrons with motor function challenges.
- Utilize partnerships/consortia for vendor volume discounts.
- Develop a disaster preparedness plan (including time needed) to get critical systems up and running in the event of an interruption.
- Implement “end of life” replacement schedules for computers and version updates of software.
- Provide access to current versions of Microsoft Office products.
- Provide software with the ability to edit PDFs, edit audio/video files and easy access to cloud storage platforms such as Dropbox.
- Add virtual and augmented reality equipment. Virtual reality is the computer-generated simulation of a three-dimensional image or environment that can be interacted with in a seemingly real or physical way by a person using special electronic equipment, such as a helmet with a screen inside or gloves fitted with sensors. From gaming to job training, virtual reality has many applications.
- If Oberlin Cable COOP does not provide Internet access to OPL, take advantage of Federal E-Rate reimbursement. These savings range between 70 and 90 percent annually and would allow for the purchase of technology that might not normally fit within the budget. E-Rate can be a difficult and confusing process as it requires submitting forms during a short window of time.
- Provide cellular hotspots for check out.
- Provide laptops and tablets for check out.

Programs and Services

- Provide a central information hub with information about tech opportunities in Oberlin.
- Consider the needs of elementary students, tweens, teens, seniors and underserved residents in any technology planning.
- Add hands on, experiential and fun opportunities like eGaming or a mobile makerspace.
- Continue providing one-on-one tech support.
- Add streaming services to catalog (music, film and TV).
- Add live help services like BrainFuse HelpNow and JobsNow.
- Focus computer support to help adults gain job certifications. Expand levels (from beginning to advanced) and offer modules that can be accessed from home. Offer on demand rather than scheduled classes.
- Offer a range of workforce development programs, including how to search for a job, resume workshops and interview coaching.
- Offer teen programs or one on one coaching in workplace basics such as punctuality, workplace etiquette, attire and anger management.
- Create eGaming programs and tournaments for teens who may not have home access to computers and gaming consoles.
- Offer STEAM activities for students in an interactive, relaxed atmosphere.
- Offer skill building sessions that incorporate substantial learning outcomes like coding, the Engineering Design Process and Certifications.
- Offer on demand tutoring and homework help.
• Offer training in Google collaboration tools.

Outreach and Partnerships

• Send staff to low income housing and senior housing to provide one-to-one device support. “Clinics” at predictable times every week. Consider operation at OPL three days per week and outreach two days per week.
• Partner with Oberlin Business Partnership to determine what tech skills are needed for local jobs.
• Strengthen partnerships with local schools. Make building relationships with administrators and teachers a part of staff job descriptions.
• Plan and implement regular staff visits to local schools.
• Use school communication methods (parent portal) to advertise Bridge programs and services.
• Collaborate with organizations and community centers to offer services at after-school care.
• Student card program (school ID card also serves as an OPL Library card).
• OPL Board reach out to Oberlin College and explore additional ways to collaborate.
APPENDIX